

RANCHO GORDO presents

# LUKAS VOLGER'S

## VEGETARIAN HEIRLOOM BEAN KITCHEN



### 5 BEAN DISHES TO COOK NOW

#### FROM THE AUTHOR OF START SIMPLE

*“One pot of heirloom beans led to another, and along the way I got better at cooking them—learning how to exercise more patience with the cooking time, more restraint with fussy additions—and gradually, they came to represent the essence of how I now cook. Which sounds like a bold statement, but I think it’s true.”*

## INTRODUCTION

My heirloom bean journey began at one of the independent grocery stores in Brooklyn, when that lady licking her lips on the Rancho Gordo label caught my eye. I marveled at the perfect little gems revealed inside the package (they were Midnight Black beans), bought it, took it home, cooked the beans, and standing over that simmering pot, I knew: This will stick. One pot of heirloom beans led to another, and along the way I got better at cooking them—learning how to exercise more patience with the cooking time, more restraint with fussy additions—and gradually, they came to represent the essence of how I now cook. Which sounds like a bold statement, but I think it's true.

Growing up in Idaho, I didn't eat a lot of beans beyond the baked ones (from a can), or in things like three-can-salads. This was a period before hummus was even much of a grocery store staple in places like Boise. I began to see their value as a young adult when I first started exploring vegetarianism, but it was always those canned beans I reached for when I'd make veggie burgers and main-dish salads. In the various restaurant and other cooking jobs I had through early adulthood, I understood that simmering dried beans from scratch was cheaper and supposed to be better, but... How much better? Was all that time really worth it? Using the dusty, bottom-shelf baggies of beans at the grocery store, it rarely was, and canned seemed just fine for my needs. But then, lucky for me, my heirloom bean journey laid its path before me.

This journey has paralleled my learning how to cook much more simply and mindfully than when I first started in food professionally. Back then, it felt like nothing was ever complete—every dish always needed a little extra dab of this, sprinkle of that, a swish of something else. Probably a lot of cooks begin this way, because it takes time to develop relationships with your ingredients. But eventually, I began to apply Coco Chanel's "take one thing off" rule to my food. This has culminated most recently in my book *Start Simple*, in which my goal is to help home cooks (and aspiring home cooks) channel the spirit of simplicity that propels me in the kitchen—fewer ingredients get to shine in recipes that are uncluttered, but still enticing and fun and amenable to swaps and substitutions.

Collected here are a few such recipes, all composed around those delicious heirloom beans. The recipes come from an improvisational, make-do-with-what-you've-got frame of mind, ones that began with trying to work with what's already on hand rather than heading out for new ingredients (this is a muscle I hope we're all developing in the time of COVID). Not everything always works, but these ones did, and they were all so satisfying that after some light tinkering, they needed to be formalized and made "official." Central to this spirit of

simplicity and "making do," they also come from the habit, developed over the course of my becoming a card-carrying Bean Club Member, of always having a tub of leftover cooked beans in their broth around. I'm probably preaching to the choir here, so this is just a hallelujah moment—but that tub of beans! What an inviting shortcut to a satisfying meal.

We'll start with a vinaigrette that combines charred scallions and lemon flesh, and that I think is incredible stirred into warm flageolet beans. Then a granola-like lentil and nut/seed "salad sprinkle" that's on near-constant rotation at my house as a condiment or, just as often, a savory snack eaten by the handful. Then a dead simple "sheet-pan salad" (which is a more concise way of saying "beans stirred into roasted vegetables") comprised of roasted cauliflower and beans and a few accents, but that truly surpasses the sum of its parts, thanks of course to the beans. A grilled toast with zucchini and big beans follows—which I can attest is an excellent dish for al fresco dining. And lastly we'll return to the elemental simplicity that's so central to what I've learned from my Rancho Gordo heirloom bean journey, with a bean and greens soup that's got a very easy, secret, creamy-lemony kick.

While the Rancho Gordo heirloom beans anchor what, to my mind, is a healthy and sensible diet, they've also deepened my understanding of how we ever-fallible humans and our ancestors fit into our agriculture and the vast network of culinary foodways that map our history. On its most basic level, I still marvel at the fact that each bean contains the life cycle of a whole new plant. But more specifically, the long, broad legacy of beans across the globe—and Rancho Gordo's work to preserve and draw attention to "new world" varieties (many of which have been rescued from near-oblivion)—has made whatever I'm cooking with them feel connected to a bigger, deeper story of food, a story that's always offering new questions and answers about how and why we eat what we do.

It almost seems like an added bonus that these beans are so very delicious, too.

## CHARRED SCALLION & LEMON VINAIGRETTE FOR WARM BEANS

This smoky-zingy dressing is great on any beans, but I'm partial to small, creamy ones—Flageolet and Alubia Blancas are my favorite—and I think it's best spooned over them when they're freshly cooked and still warm, using a ladleful of the bean broth to loosen things up and add an extra layer of savoriness. (Chilled, the dressed beans do still make a terrific addition to a picnic spread.) The vinaigrette employs a trick I like, where the flesh of the lemon is coarsely chopped and stirred into the other ingredients, such that the resulting salad is interspersed with bright, puckery bits. If you've never supremed a citrus before and my instructions here are difficult to visualize, I recommend quickly Googling a video tutorial on YouTube—it makes perfect sense once you see it.

Serves 4

*3 tablespoons olive oil, plus a splash*

*2 thick scallions, or 4 to 5 thin ones*

*Salt*

*1 juicy lemon*

*2 teaspoons apple cider vinegar*

*½ teaspoon honey*

*Freshly ground black pepper*

*2 cups cooked mild-flavored, creamy Rancho Gordo beans, with a bit of their broth (Flageolet, Ayocote Blanco, Caballero, Alubia Blanca), warmed*

Heat a skillet over high heat. Trim off the root ends of the scallions then cut in half or thirds lengthwise, so that they can fit, laid flat, in the skillet. Toss with a splash of olive oil and a pinch of salt. Spread out in the hot skillet and char, pressing down firmly with a spatula to encourage blistering. Cook until well charred and the thickest parts are softened—thick scallions will take a few minutes; thin ones much less. Transfer to a cutting board and, once safe to handle, coarsely chop and scoop into a small mixing bowl.

Zest the lemon over the scallions, then supreme the fruit: Trim off the ends of the lemon, deeply enough to expose the flesh,

and set it upright on a cutting board on one of its now-flat surfaces. Working your way around, use a sharp knife to cut off all the peel and pith. Then, holding the naked fruit in your non-dominant hand, use a sharp knife to carefully slice out all the citrus segments from the segment walls. Pick out any seeds, then coarsely chop the flesh and add to the scallions, along with any juices that may have pooled on your cutting board. Stir in the vinegar, ½ teaspoon salt, honey, and then the 3 tablespoons olive oil. Season with pepper and taste for seasoning.

To serve, stir the vinaigrette into the warm beans, along with a ladleful or two of the bean broth.

## CRISPY LENTIL SALAD SPRINKLE

This is essentially granola, but without any grains—equal parts cooked lentils and nuts and/or seeds provide all the body here, so it ends up being quite hearty (though by no means heavy). And while there's a little sugar in there to round out the earthy spices, it's a savory thing. Treat it as a healthy snack to nibble on or add to an appetizer spread, or to sprinkle over yogurt, bowls of squash soup, or as the name suggests, green salads.

The egg white in here means that the mixture has nice big clumps, which make for easy snacking but also some textural variety. But you can leave the egg white out and have a looser mixture, too. This yield works best on what restaurants call a “quarter sheet” pan, which is half the size of a regular baking sheet. A 9x13 baking dish works just as well, or double the recipe for a standard baking sheet.

Makes 2 cups

*1 egg white*

*1 tablespoon olive oil*

*2 teaspoons sugar, brown or white*

*¾ teaspoon kosher salt*

*½ teaspoon dried thyme*

*½ teaspoon cumin seeds*

*¼ teaspoon mild ground chili (aleppo, silk, ancho), or a pinch of standard dried red pepper flakes*

*Freshly ground black pepper, to taste*

*1 cup cooked Rancho Gordo lentils, drained and cooled*

*1 cup mixed nuts and/or seeds (whole or coarsely chopped almonds, pecans, walnuts, hazelnuts, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, etc)*

Preheat the oven to 325°F, and line a small baking sheet or 9x13 baking dish with parchment paper.

In a mixing bowl, whisk together the egg white, oil, sugar, and all the spices until the egg white is broken down and the mixture appears a bit frothy. Add the lentils and the nuts and/or seeds and stir well to coat evenly.

Spread the mixture out on the prepared pan, and bake for 40 to 50 minutes, until the mixture is dry and the lentils crisp. Stir every 15 to 20 minutes, but aim to leave some of the clumps intact.

Allow the mixture to cool, then store in an airtight container for up to a week. The mixture does lose a bit of its snap as it sits, but that never stops me from eating it.



## SHEET PAN CAULIFLOWER & BEAN SALAD

The first few iterations of this dish were as a creamy cauliflower-bean sauce for dressing hot pasta, dolloping on grain bowls, or using as a dip—and it was delicious. But as I kept finessing the recipe, putting those lovingly cooked Rancho Gordo beans into a Vitamix and obliterating all the gem-like skins and unique textures... it started to bother me. So I stopped short, treating this instead as a simple salad that showcases the beans rather than disguises them.

Any small-to-medium sized bean here will do (Alubia Blanca, Flor de Mayo, Rio Zape, Pinto, Domingo Rojo, Cranberry, Caballero, etc), but make sure to use one that's still paired with its scrumptious broth. And I find that the cooking time for cauliflower can really vary—farmers-market cauliflower, in my experience, is much less watery and can hold up to a hot oven a lot longer than the conventional grocery store stuff, which can turn soft and mushy before it browns. The goal is to get the cauliflower nicely browned but still retain some texture, and as usual, it's best to check often and taste as you go.

If you'd like to try this as a sauce, simply puree the roasted cauliflower, onion, and beans in a high-powered blender, using the bean broth plus a splash of olive oil as needed to create the consistency you like, then season with oregano and lemon juice.

Serves 4

*1 large or 2 small cauliflower*

*1 medium white or yellow onion, sliced into strips*

*¼ cup olive oil*

*1 teaspoon kosher salt*

*Freshly ground black pepper*

*2 cups cooked Rancho Gordo beans, with a few ladlefuls of their broth, warmed (see headnote)*

*½ to 1 teaspoon dried Rancho Gordo Oregano Indigo or Mexican oregano*

*Handful whole parsley leaves*

*Lemon wedges for garnish*

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Break off the cauliflower into large florets, and then cut through the stems into smaller pieces (quarters or halves)—creating flat surfaces this way increases the space for caramelization, so I feel this fussy extra step is worth it. Slice the core into thin slabs. Place in a mixing bowl with the onion, ¼ cup olive oil, and 1 teaspoon salt, and toss to thoroughly combine. Spread all the contents onto a baking sheet, using a spatula to scrape out all of the oil and crumbly bits from the bowl so that nothing is wasted. Transfer to the oven and roast for 15 to 35 minutes, until the cauliflower florets are tender and their exteriors nicely browned (or just tender, if that's what comes first—don't let it turn to mush).

Taste for seasoning, adding more salt or oregano if needed. Just before serving, scatter the parsley leaves over the top. At the table, offer lemon wedges on the side.

Add the beans, a few ladlefuls of the bean broth, the oregano, and lots of grinds of black pepper directly to the sheet pan—either while the roasted cauliflower and onion are still hot or cooled to room temperature—and gently stir to combine.

## GRILLED TOASTS WITH ZUCCHINI & BIG BEANS

I have a special fondness for the big beans—Christmas Limas, Large White Limas, Royal Coronas. There's something about spearing a fat one with my fork that really satisfies, and they always feel so hearty in a vegetarian main, whether as part of a baked dish, or pan-fried 'til crispy, or in some kind of salad. Here, I add them to one of my favorite flavor pairings: mildly sweet and floral zucchini plus crunchy roasted almonds (also sweet and floral), accented with lots of fresh herbs, which creates the feeling of an evening summer breeze rolling through the garden. Spooned over grilled bread, you've got a perfect summer main right here.

Note that the bread can break the dish. If you don't have good, fresh bread—like a nice, fresh sourdough loaf with some structure—it may be better to treat the topping as a salad instead.

Serves 4

*12 ounces small-to-medium-sized zucchini*

*2 cups cooked Rancho Gordo Large White Limas, Christmas Limas, or Royal Coronas, drained*

*1 clove garlic, finely grated or minced*

*Big pinch chili flakes (or to taste)*

*1 to 2 lemons*

*1 tablespoon white wine vinegar*

*Olive oil*

*4 slices rustic bread*

*Heaping ¼ cup chopped, fresh tender herbs: basil, dill, parsley, mint, fennel fronds, cilantro*

*¼ cup coarsely chopped roasted almonds*

Grill the zucchini: Prepare a medium-high flame and preheat your grill. When hot, place the zucchini directly over the flames and cook, turning periodically, until blackened all over and the zucchini is tender, which will take anywhere from 10 to 25 minutes, depending on their size. (No need to trim your zucchini or rub it with olive oil.) Transfer to a cutting board to cool until safe to handle, then coarsely chop into pieces about the size of the beans.

In a mixing bowl, combine the zucchini with the beans, garlic, pepper flakes, the zest and juice of 1 lemon, white wine vinegar, and 2 to 3 tablespoons of olive oil. Season to taste with salt, then add more lemon juice if needed. I think this is best with an almost aggressive amount of lemon.

Returning to the grill: Brush your bread generously with olive oil, then quickly grill over direct heat until the bread is charred and lightly crisp. Flip and repeat.

Just before serving, stir the herbs and almonds into the beans and zucchini. Spoon the mixture over the warm toasts, and serve, with a knife and fork.

## SIMPLE BEAN & GREEN SOUP

If you're already a Rancho Gordo disciple, you likely cook the way of this elementally simple soup, where the beans and their scrumptious broth have done 80% of the work up front. This one incorporates a heap of wilted, well-seasoned greens, and also gets its distinction with the addition of cream and a few strips of lemon zest, which add body and a lick of floral brightness. And while its simplicity is always refreshing and appealing to me, this soup also welcomes all manner of additions.

I typically raid my leftovers to extend it a little further—you can add roasted sweet potatoes or other steamed or grilled vegetables; a boiled egg; condiments like salsas, pickled onions, relishes, or scatterings of crumbly cheese, croutons, or a handful of stale tortilla chips; or even leftover chicken or other meat. I'm including my own bean-cooking method in the recipe below, but feel free to substitute that step with whatever method you prefer.

Serves 6

*1 pound small-to-medium sized creamy beans (Rancho Gordo Ayocote Blanco, Marcella, Alubia Blanca—any bean, really, but black and red beans will produce a murkier looking soup)*

*Olive oil*

*2 bay leaves*

*Kosher salt*

*½ pound hearty greens (2 to 3 bunches), stemmed and coarsely chopped (kale, swiss chard, spinach, etc, or a combination)*

*1 medium onion or 3 to 4 shallots, minced*

*5 cloves garlic, sliced*

*Big pinch chili flakes*

*½ cup heavy cream*

*3 thick strips lemon peel, made using a vegetable peeler*

Cook the beans (which can be soaked in advance if you like):

In a pot, cover the beans with about 2 inches of water and bring to a boil. Add a few glugs of olive oil, the bay leaves, and 2 teaspoons of kosher salt. Reduce the heat and simmer gently until the beans are tender, which will take anywhere from 45 minutes to a few hours, adding additional hot water as needed to keep the beans submerged. As you taste for doneness, also taste for salt, adding more as needed. The beans can be cooked a few days in advance and stored (once cool) in their broth in an airtight container.

Prepare the greens: Warm a splash of oil over medium-low heat in a Dutch oven or other tall soup-pot, and then pile in the greens, tossing as they cook down. Cook until soft and tender—how long it takes will depend on the type of green. Season carefully with salt and transfer to a cutting board. Once cool enough to handle, run a chef's knife over the greens to give them a finer chop.

Raise the heat to medium and add a few tablespoons of olive oil to the pot, followed by the onion, garlic, and chili flakes. Cook until the onion is soft and translucent, 5 to 7 minutes, then stir in the chopped greens, cooking for a few minutes to unite with the onions. Lastly, add the beans, their broth, the cream, and lemon peel, and bring to a simmer. You may need a bit of extra water (or stock) to ensure that the beans are submerged. Cook gently for about 15 minutes. Fish out the lemon peel and bay leaves before serving.

## MORE ABOUT LUKAS VOLGER

Lukas Volger is the author of four vegetarian cookbooks, including the newly released *Start Simple: Eleven Everyday Ingredients for Countless Weeknight Meals*. He's also the founder and editorial director of *Jarry*, a James Beard Award-winning biannual food magazine that explores where food and queer culture intersect, and previously founded *Made by Lukas*, a Brooklyn-based line of premium veggie burgers. His food writing has appeared in *Vogue*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, *Time*, *The Splendid Table*, *Food52*, and other publications.

You can purchase his newest cookbook online at <https://bookshop.org/books/start-simple-eleven-every-day-ingredients-for-countless-weeknight-meals/9780062883599?aid=11529>

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